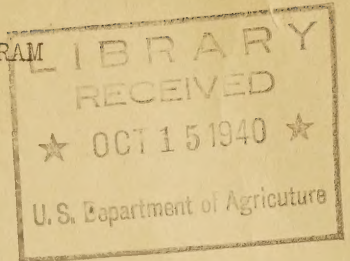


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THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FSA PROGRAM  
IN VIEW OF PRESENT WORLD CONDITIONS.

by  
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I. MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK

We live today in a world shaken by a struggle between two ways of life: The totalitarian way, and the democratic way. Men are fighting, and men, women and children are dying, today in this conflict between two systems of government. Each side is confident, apparently, that its system of government will best serve the needs of the people.

We are affected by this conflict. Life is not static. It is always changing, and circumstances in the world today are forcing us toward a different way of life. Just what kind of life does destiny have in store for us in the future? In my opinion, we are moving in either of two alternative directions:

The first of these is toward a totalitarian way of life in which the individual becomes of little significance and is subordinated to the State. Under such a system the masses of people are denied the opportunity to participate in the decisions that are made as to how they will live. They are controlled not by themselves, but by dictators, usually self-appointed dictators. The use of force is considered a virtue and force becomes the instrument most frequently used for settling differences.

The second of these alternative directions is toward a democratic way of life, in fact, even a more democratic way of life than we now know. Under such a system personal liberties are enjoyed, the citizens participate in the decisions that affect them. The individual is respected by his fellow citizens, by his government, and by himself.

As between these two alternative directions, I hope, and I know that you hope, that the change will be toward a more democratic way of life. I firmly believe that - if we as citizens



of a democratic government are willing to accept the responsibilities as well as the privileges of living in a democratic country - we can keep our way of life, strengthen and improve it, and make it even more democratic than it is now.

Those of us in this country who are interested in democratic institutions, in democratic government - and not all of us are - must get busy, now, to strengthen democracy and make it work better. If we don't do it now, generations may elapse before we have another opportunity. That it is already pretty late for this effort seems obvious when we look at the world today.

We must build our democracy into an effective instrument for action, for action in better serving the needs and encouraging the aspirations of all of our people, not of a few, not of just a majority, but of all of our people. We must make our political, economic and social system even more democratic. Democracy is a relative term. Our government in this country today is one of the most democratic of any on the face of the earth, but even so, many of our people are not participating members of our Democracy. The task before the nation today is to assure that all of our people have an opportunity to participate in our democracy and to receive benefits from such participation. Only people who have a stake in democracy are likely to prefer it to any other kind of government. Too many people today have very little, if any, stake in our democracy. The best way to strengthen that democracy is to be sure that all of our people have a stake in it.

The significance of the FSA program in view of present world conditions is simply that the FSA is one of the most effective of the institutions that are helping to make the country more democratic. It is one arm of our democratic government that is helping our democracy provide social and economic opportunity to one group of our citizens, the low-income farm group, which has been outside of, or at best only on the fringe of our democracy. If democracy is to continue, it must provide economic opportunity to all of our people.

We the people, society as a whole, or government, however you wish to say it, must see to it that every able-bodied citizen has an opportunity to earn a good living. I do not intend to say in this that the government owes everybody a living - what I do say is that the government owes every able-bodied citizen an opportunity to earn a good living. The FSA has the same kind of responsibility today as it had before the development of the present world situation. However, world conditions today have intensified the need for the contribution that the FSA is making in preserving and strengthening democracy. This means that today the FSA has a greater responsibility than ever before.

## II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FSA IN THE NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM.

There are two important considerations in our national defense program. For one thing, we must strengthen our first line of defense; that is, we must strengthen our army, navy and air forces. The reliance upon force as the instrument for settling differences in so many parts of the world today requires us to be strong from a military standpoint in order to be able to resist aggressors.

At the same time, we must strengthen our second line of defense; that is, we must strengthen the physical, moral and spiritual fiber of our people. The FSA contribution, as I see it, lies in strengthening this second line of defense, which is fully as important as the first line of defense. If we are to survive as a democracy we must be strong and all of us must be willing to defend democracy, to work for it and to fight for it, if necessary.

Thus, the FSA program is making a significant contribution to national defense, since through creating new opportunities for disadvantaged farm families it is strengthening and improving democracy itself. Certainly this strengthening of democracy is one of the most important factors in national defense.

## III. SOME ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE WAR ON AMERICAN AGRICULTURE AND SOME QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE DEFENSE PROGRAM.

We lost a portion of our foreign market due merely to war preparation in Europe.

We lost still more due to war itself.

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We may have to make adjustments to possible decreased foreign demand for cotton, tobacco, wheat and fruits. We must be prepared to help the producers of some of these crops to shift to other enterprises, possibly even to other occupations, should decreased demand make such shifts necessary. Just what are the alternative enterprises or occupations?

In case the market demand for certain commodities, such as dairy and poultry products, fruits and vegetables, and meat, should be materially increased as a result of increased domestic consumption or some other cause, do we know where and how shifts could be made to meet increased demand.

Let us consider that almost one and one-half million agricultural workers were either totally or partially unemployed in 1937 and that at least another million and a half were underemployed because they lived on poor land or extremely small units. Then let us ask ourselves for how many of these disadvantaged farm people can additional employment or a better way of life be found through such devices as a conservation works program, bringing new land into cultivation, splitting up large farms, the development of more efficient and better organized subsistence farming, or training for industrial work which may develop in connection with the defense program.

Just what is the current prevalence of easily communicable diseases, of diseases caused by malnutrition, of the need for correcting visual defects, of the need for dental work?

To what extent do low-income farm families need more food or a better balanced diet, increased medical care of surgical work?

To what extent can the farm people in each county themselves bring about improvements in this connection and to what extent can the FSA, working with county land-use planning committees and through its own action program, assist farm people in meeting these needs as a national defense measure?

Particularly, what can the FSA do to assist one million rural youth who now lack opportunity for adequate training and for occupational outlets, either in farm or in urban industry.

World War No. 1 hastened centralization of industry in large urban centers. It appears that the present defense effort may accelerate present trends toward a greater decentralization of some types of industry because from the standpoint of defense against air bombing attack many of the new defense plants probably will be located on a more scattered basis in rural areas. The implication here is in the direction of a better balanced national economy.

#### IV. IMPROVING DEMOCRACY THROUGH PLANNING AND ACTION.

1. We can't plan in a vacuum. The planning process must have participation at community, county, state, regional and Washington levels. Planning must be cooperative to be effective. Representatives of federal and state agencies, together with representative farm men and women must sit down together in making plans for the future. We must find out what we want before action can be effective in getting it. Planning must be democratic. We must re-orient our thinking in terms of the needs of all of the people and planning must take into consideration the welfare of all of the people. The FSA can make a valuable contribution to the State and Local Planning program by bringing to the attention of all planners the needs and desires of the low-income group. In our planning work we must consider the need for parity within agriculture as well as the need for parity between agriculture and urban industry. Through planning we must work out devices for providing opportunities for all.

#### 2. Problems in need of attention.

A. Education and educational policies. We need a broader base of support for education than a poor rural community can supply. What should we teach?

B. Health policies.

C. Rural Housing.

D. Land Policies.

The misuse of land produces poverty; poverty in turn produces more misuse of land. In view of this, let us encourage and protect the owner-operated, family-sized farm. While not the only method, it does appear to furnish a practical approach to problems of land policy.

The agricultural ladder is not working as it



should. Lack of opportunity to go up this ladder tends to create a permanent farm labor class. Something must be done to deal with the problem of migratory laborers.

Is a land policy a good one if it permits a type of farming which requires migratory laborers and sharecroppers?

Can a land policy be right if it requires 350,000 farm families to live as this many or more migratory workers' families are compelled to live?

Increase in tenancy must be dealt with.

Decrease of equities is a serious problem. If the increase in tenancy is combined with the increase in farm mortgage indebtedness, the figures show that the equities of families who actually till the soil have dropped from 62% in 1880 to 39% in 1935.

Then, there is migration of wealth to cities. We worry about principal payments on farms cutting into living standards and yet find that succeeding generations buy the same farms over and over again and each spends a lifetime in paying for them.

Fifty percent of the farmers produce 89 percent of the products marketed, while the other fifty percent produce only 11%.

E. Technological changes in agriculture.

(The technology report of the BAE and the Department will be issued very soon.)

Mechanization of farms greatly reduces man-labor requirements on good land adapted to mechanization, at the same time that we have heavy unemployment in cities and a great increase in farm population, particularly on poor soil.

F. Increase of farm population of work age.

G. Unemployment and under-employment on farms.

Rural conservation works program.

Combination FSA loans and grants.

H. Lack of opportunity for one million rural youths.

V. THE BATTLE AGAINST POVERTY.

There is no excuse for poverty in the United States. We have a more favorable ratio between population and natural resources here than in any other nation on the globe. The FSA has made progress in the battle against rural poverty, but still has the task of learning how to "dig deeper". Poverty must and can be eliminated.

Just a word about the families with which you are working: We must have confidence in them. We must have respect for them. We must help them to appreciate themselves. We must help them to become participating members in their communities. We must help them to become participating members in our democracy.

We have helped them to get some of the things to live by.

Our greater task is to help them to have more of the things to live for.



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